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THE BUFFALO NEWS

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rock writing

Critics are taking

has creem curdled

the revived rock magazine edited by Buffalo's Robert Seidenberg

A comparison of the old and new Creem, right, published by Marvin Scott Jarrett and editor Robert Seidenberg, left and right below.

BY ELMER PLOETZ
News Staff Reporter

BRAVE NEW WAVE OR FRANKENSTEIN CREATURE?

Is the new monster-size Creem magazine really a new way of looking at rock 'n' roll in print, or is it the literary equivalent of exhuming John Lennon's bones and propping a guitar across his ribs?

These are the questions posed by publisher Marvin Scott Jarrett and executive editor Robert Seidenberg with their resurrection of rock's most storied magazine.

Jarrett defends his magazine, saying he wanted to "create something that would be very visually appealing. The way that music has gotten so visual, with MTV and so forth, I just felt it was time that a music magazine take a more visual approach."

But the rock literati in general, and writers and editors of the old Creem in particular, are having none of it.

"Soulless tripe" and "offensive" are descriptions of the new magazine from Dave Marsh, the nation's most visible rock critic and an editor with the original Creem. Former Creem editors David Sprague and Billy Altman also have voiced their doubts about the magazine, and Village Voice critic Robert Christgau, whose consumer's guide appeared in the old Creem, calls it "an attempt at a biz magazine."

In some ways, the criticisms are understandable. The original Creem, published from 1969 through early 1989, played the scruffy, pot-smoking little brother to Rolling Stone as that publication grew pompous and serious to the point that it was no longer really a rock 'n' roll magazine (and it was one only briefly). Creem had no such pretensions, popping bubbles where it found them with a wisecracking style and some of the best writers around.

For its readers, the old Creem was the only rock magazine you could find on the newsstand to speak for the outsiders, smart enough not to insult their intelligence and hip enough to embrace punk rock early on.

But now it's as if Creem has returned after a term at the clinic, wearing gold chains instead of rags, steroids its pharmaceutical of choice.

As resurrected by Jarrett, who purchased the rights to the name and the logo, and by editor Seidenberg, a Buffalo native and a graduate of the Nichols School, the magazine is huge.

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i don't get it

Music

Philharmonic announces a streamlined '91-92 season

By HERMAN TROTTER
News Music Critic

Valdes

The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra has announced its Classics Concerts Series for 1991-92, 18 pairs of concerts which are somewhat streamlined.

But the presence on the schedule of such renowned guest artists as pianist Alicia de Larrocha, flutist Carol Wincenc and violinist Elmar Oliveira makes it clear that no concessions have been made in the standard of programming quality which Music Director Maximiano Valdes has fought for since he took over the orchestra at the start of the 1989-90 season.

With respect to the musical content of the programs, there will be a pronounced emphasis on the music of Mozart, inasmuch as 1991 is the 200th anniversary of his death. Maestro Valdes also will complete his Schumann Symphony Cycle, while Beethoven, Sibelius, Ravel and previously unheard Shostakovich works will be spotlighted.

As he looks forward to his third season with the Philharmonic, Valdes is sticking firmly to his original contention that symphonic concerts should be the heart of an orchestra's programming. To that end, he increased the Classics Concerts Series to 18 concerts from 16 during the current season.

The streamlining, therefore, does not include a retrenchment from the 18-concert level.

Rather, the changes involve: first, a slight reduction in the number of concerts, not the number of programs; second, a concentration of concert dates on weekends; and third, a marked reduction in the number of mini-series ticket packages available to subscribers.

More specifically, next season each concert will be presented in Kleinhans Music Hall two times only. During the current season there had been seven programs scheduled for three performances each. This practice has been discontinued.

In addition, the 1991-92 concerts will all be on Saturday eve-

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Pop Music

John Lombardo and Mary Ramsey didn't make the cover.

Talents harmonize in debut of WNY duo

By DALE ANDERSON
News Critic

ON THE cover of their new nationally released debut album, "Victory Gardens," they're all but incognito.

The photos are not of them. What's shown instead are some surrealistically bright everyday scenes from the '50s.

Furthermore, they've been shorn of their surnames. They're presented to the world simply as John and Mary.

"I guess after a while they got tired of saying our last names," explained Mary Ramsey as she and John Lombardo talked, sipped tea and slouched on a dilapidated couch in Lombardo's West Side apartment on the eve of their album release earlier this month.

In Buffalo, of course, everybody who knows them knows their last names. They've been frequent performers on the acoustic club circuit for the past two years.

Those who don't know them from the clubs may recognize them once their music starts playing, especially if they happen to be fans of the hit Jamestown folk-rock band 10,000 Maniacs.

Lombardo was a founding member and creative force behind 10,000 Maniacs. Not surprisingly, John and Mary's "Victory Gardens" bears more than a passing resemblance to earlier Maniacs albums such as "The Wishing Chair." The difference is that it's lighter, more elegant and better-defined — sort of like folk-rock chamber music.

What makes most of the difference is Ramsey. A classically trained violinist and violist, she

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When writing rocked Buffalo

Buffalo a hotbed of rock 'n' roll criticism?

Yes, there was a time in the 1970s when Buffalo may have led the nation in rock literacy, and part of the credit goes to Jeff Nesin.

Nesin, then a graduate student and professor at the University at Buffalo, taught the university's first courses on the effects of popular culture in America.

"At first it was regarded as a poisonous avocation that people wished I would take somewhere else, or at least be quiet about," says Nesin. "Now there are branches of cultural studies that are devoted to particular aspects of popular culture."

In his classes, Nesin, himself a music writer, encountered and encouraged Billy Altman and Joe Fernbacher, two writers who went on to help define rock criticism at Creem magazine in the '70s.

Altman's style was mainstream, focusing frequently on putting the music into a social and historical framework (in recent years he has produced the RCA Heritage series of pre-1950 blues and country releases, as well as writing for Rolling Stone, Esquire and Connoisseur).

Fernbacher, on the other hand, was more likely to write stream-of-consciousness prose embracing the trashier side of things.

The result was two issues of Punk, a magazine associated with UB's Spectrum newspaper that predated the punk-new wave music movement by three years. But it was the attitude that counted.

Around the same time, Nesin, Fernbacher and Altman were involved in the Institute of Rock 'n' Roll Studies, which drew together like-minded souls such as disc jockey Jim Santella and a teen-age Gary Sperrazza, now the owner of Buffalo's Apollo Records store.

The results were a bit like a long-term chain reaction. While Altman returned to write from New York, Fernbacher started working for Creem out of Buffalo and with Sperrazza started Shakin' Street Gazette, a publication out of Buffalo State College. Greg Shaw, publisher of the '70s journal Bomp!, labeled it "America's best local rock magazine."

Sperrazza and Fernbacher also shook loose $3,000 from the college's student activities fund for a rock writers symposium in 1974 that brought in, among others, writers Lester Bangs, Nick Tosches, Shaw, Richard Meltzer and two writers on their way to becoming rock stars, Patti Smith and Lenny Kaye.

Later in the '70s, Buffalo State generated such magazines as Fox Trot and Bernie Kugel's Big Star. The line halted at the end of the decade with Rockers (Andrew Elias and Bill Poczik from that magazine would eventually start New York Talk with Robert Seidenberg). Then the writers, for the most part, scattered. College radio — not music writing — became Buffalo's new-music medium.

And what became of Nesin?

He moved into college administration. In July, he will leave the School of Visual Arts in New York to become president of the Memphis (Tenn.) College of Art.

But he has continued writing about music, and teaching his courses on popular music in American culture. In a recent interview, he said he had just found himself in class quoting Fernbacher in trying to put the American Music Awards into context.

"There's good taste and bad taste, but no taste is the best taste of all."

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